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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL GM

SUBJECT: GERMAN PUBLIC STUNNED BY ATTACK ON POLICE CHIEF

REFS: A) Berlin Political Squib of 12/16/2008 (NOTAL), B) Leipzig
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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: German officials, the public, and the media are up in arms over the near-fatal stabbing of Alois Mannichl, the Passau (Bavaria) police chief, on the doorstep of his home on December 13 (REF A). Despite no arrest in the case yet, there are calls for a ban on the neo-Nazi NPD party, which is implicated in the attack. If confirmed as a right-wing attack, it would represent a new and dangerous tactic of bringing violence into the private sphere of prominent persons. As neo-Nazi attacks rise nationwide (REF B), especially and surprisingly more so in western Germany, Bavarian politicians are using the case to argue that a "return to the center" is the best way to fight the fringes. End Summary.

STRONG POLITICAL REACTION, DESPITE NO HARD PROOF

¶2. (SBU) Passau Police Chief Alois Mannichl reported that, when the perpetrator attacked, he said, "Greetings from the national resistance. You'll trample on the graves of our comrades no longer." Investigators suggested that this was a general reference to the police chief's determination to fight the right-wing scene in Passau and specifically to his removing a swastika from the coffin during the burial of a former Nazi last summer. Indications are that the perpetrator was from the far right, neo-Nazi scene, but the police have no absolute proof yet and are investigating in all directions, according to Waldemar Kindler, President of the Bavarian State Police, who spoke with P/E chief on December 17

¶3. (SBU) With no suspects yet in custody and no hard proof of a neo-Nazi connection, Kindler was circumspect. He acknowledged the very sensitive nature of the allegations against the neo-Nazis and their political party, the National Democratic Party (NPD), and the very strong national reactions that the attack had already generated in the public, media and among politicians. He carefully pointed out that the perpetrator could have been a neo-Nazi, as Chief Mannichl believes it was, or someone from the far Left, or even someone from the victim's circle of acquaintances or related to another case. The NPD leadership has denied involvement in the case, Kindler said, but he added that party members had indeed called for the removal of Mannichl and had incited hatred directed towards him.

¶4. (U) Not waiting for an arrest, the Bavarian Landtag passed a unanimous resolution on December 16 that ordered Kindler's office to develop by February a two-part concept to fight right-wing extremism. As an immediate measure, Kindler said he would likely propose stricter laws against injuring police officers. More broadly, he expects to focus on prevention and programs for people ready to quit the extremist scene.

MORE AND NEW KINDS OF ATTACKS

¶15. (U) German government spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm said the attack appeared to mark a new level of violence by the far-right. If confirmed with an arrest, it would show that adherents to the scene are no longer afraid to bring violence into the private sphere of prominent persons. The Bavarian Interior Ministry has confirmed that violent acts committed by neo-Nazis have more than doubled in the Passau region this year to 83, up from 40 in 2007. Passau is just over the border from the region of Upper Austria, where police point out there is also a notorious and active right-wing scene. Police have registered about 950 attacks by far-right extremists across Germany in 2008, including one killing. In absolute terms, the majority of these attacks have been in the States of the former West Germany, not the East, a point that German commentators are currently emphasizing.

WHAT NEXT? A BAN ON THE NPD?

¶16. (U) Although there has been no link established yet between the right wing radical party (NPD) and the Passau case, the attack rekindled calls for banning the party. This would start a Germany-wide debate and touch on fundamental historical and political issues, and do so in the year of celebrating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall and reunification of Germany. A previous attempt in 2002 to ban the NPD party was rejected by the Federal Constitutional Court as unconstitutional on technical grounds. The NPD, a fringe group, reportedly has about 7,300 members, and it is the most radical of the extreme right parties in Germany with a platform which is openly anti-foreigner, racist and

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anti-Semitic. Kindler pointed out that although the NPD got only 1.2 percent of the vote in the September 2008 Bavarian Landtag elections, he believes there is sympathy for its politics among young people who do not vote.

COMMENT

¶17. (SBU) Horst Seehofer, Minister President of Bavaria, is riding a wave at the moment and this incident could help him promote the idea that voters should support the traditional, democratic center party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union (CSU). He will surely continue to argue that a strong center is the best way to neutralize the fringes. The Parliamentary Control Commission, tasked with monitoring the intelligence services, received a briefing about NPD activities in the Passau region on December 17 from the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. We expect a debate about a ban to continue in the German political and public consciousness for some time.

¶18. (U) Consulate General Munich coordinated this report with Embassy Berlin. Track Munich reporting at <http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Germ> any.

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